



City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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November 21, 2006

Honorable Councilmember Peter Steinbrueck
Chair, Urban Development and Planning Committee
Seattle City Council - Seattle City Hall
PO Box 34025
Seattle, WA 98124-4025

Re: Recommendations to City Council UDP on revision to the Commercial Code

Dear Councilmember Steinbrueck,

The Seattle Planning Commission (SPC) is pleased to share with you its comments on the Urban Development and Planning Committee recommendations for changes to the City's commercial land use regulations as outlined in Council Bills CB 115745 and CB 115746. The Commission has been closely following proposed changes to the Commercial Code since 2003 and remind you that we provided you with significant comments on Mayor's proposed Neighborhood Business District Strategy (NBDS) proposal in May 2005 which may be worth your review. In regards to the specific changes proposed by the UDP committee, the Planning Commission has the following recommendations;

1. Use Regulations. We endorse the reduction in the number of categories and subcategories of uses, as consistent with the code simplification objective of the legislation.
2. Lodging. We did not make a specific review of the Executive's proposal nor the UDP Committee's changes, and accordingly take no position on this part of the legislation.
3. Maximum Size of Use. We endorse this part of the legislation, as consistent with the code simplification objective.
4. Bulk Regulations. We strongly endorse the change in bulk regulation from the current lot-coverage limitation to a Floor-Area-Ratio system. This change will provide greater flexibility in design of mixed-use buildings and should result in significant improvements in their massing and scale.
5. Mixed-Use Structures. We generally endorse the proposed changes to the regulations governing where residential use at street level is permitted. Having worked extensively with both DPD Staff and Council Central Staff on this issue, we have a few caveats regarding the proposed changes:

- a. The description of the proposed changes as approved by UDP (September 28 2006) correctly describes how the interim regulations are to be maintained on arterials, which is the solution that finally emerged for maintaining the current regulations in place until the completion of the pedestrian overly mapping in the neighborhoods. This regulation is intended to no longer apply in a given neighborhood once the mapping is complete and the necessary rezone legislation is adopted. We cannot find in the draft legislation (September 15, 2006), however, any provision to implement the lifting of the regulation with respect to arterials once the mapping is complete and the necessary rezone legislation is adopted in a neighborhood. We believe this may be an oversight in drafting the legislation.
 - b. Although the prohibition on street-level residential uses in the Bitter Lake and Lake City neighborhoods is consistent with their Neighborhood Plans, it is inconsistent with the approach now to be taken in the rest of the city. We have previously recommended that DPD staff work with the Bitter Lake and Lake City neighborhoods to modify their plans to meet the objectives of this legislation.
6. Residential Density Limitations. We strongly endorse the lifting of residential density limitations, as they no longer serve any purpose once the other provisions of this legislation are adopted.
 7. Landscaping and Usable Open Space. While we strongly endorse the environmental objectives of the Seattle Green Factor proposal, we have concerns over the potential for difficulties in the implementation of the proposal. Because this is a complex matter we have addressed this issue in a separate letter of even date.
 8. Pedestrian Designations. We endorse the consolidation of the two pedestrian designations into a single zone, as well as the associated changes attendant on this consolidation. We endorse the changes to the P zones in the five neighborhoods approved by the Committee. We are not aware of the reasons that the Executive's proposal for the Admiral neighborhood was not approved by the Committee, and accordingly take no position on that issue.
 9. Parking. We endorse the proposed changes to parking regulations.
 10. Bicycle Parking. We did not make a specific review of this part of the proposal, and accordingly take no position on this part of the legislation.
 11. Street-front Development Standards. We do not endorse these provisions of the legislation in their entirety as currently proposed. Because this is a complex matter we have addressed this issue in a separate letter.

The Commission supports the notion of simplification and reform of the commercial code as a way to bolster thriving neighborhood business districts that are crucial for communities. We recognize the important role that neighborhood commercial areas play in providing goods and services to the community. Neighborhood business districts enrich the fabric and vitality of our neighborhoods, making them active, lively community places while reducing the need for residents to drive long distances to goods and services. The UDP committee, Council Central staff and Executive staff are to be commended for the hard work and dedicated effort to achieve the worthy goals and objectives of this effort. The Commission recommends adoption of the proposal most expeditiously, with modifications listed above.

Please feel free to contact the Commission for clarification on any of these points through our Executive Director, Barbara Wilson at (206) 684-0431.

Sincerely,



Jerry Finrow, Chair
Seattle Planning Commission

CC:
Greg Nickels, Mayor
Seattle City Council
Tim Ceis, Deputy Mayor
Grace Crunican, Susan Sanchez, SDOT
Diane Sugimura, John Rahaim, John Skelton, Lish Whitson, DPD
Rebecca Herzfeld, Keitel Freeman, Council Central Staff

Record of Disclosure

Commissioner Tom Eanes disclosed that he is employed by Hewitt Architects and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Chris Fiori disclosed that he is employed by Heartland LLC, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future.

Commissioner Kay Knapton disclosed that she is a consultant to neighborhood business districts.

Commissioner Tony To disclosed that he is employed by Homesight, a non profit housing developer, and that they could potentially develop in a commercially zoned area in the future. He noted that Homesight has no current development projects underway in a Neighborhood Commercial zone.